



Hear case in court

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— State Attorney General Drew Edmondson, like any citizen, is welcome to his opinion, and most Oklahomans probably agree with him about poultry waste.

But Edmondson appears to be tainting the well of public opinion when it comes to his lawsuit against Arkansas poultry companies.

Edmondson claimed earlier that poultry waste applied to fields likely was responsible for the Locust Grove E. coli poisoning, an outbreak this past August that made 300 people ill and killed one person.

But the state Health Department countered Edmondson, saying it has not identified the E. coli strain, O111, responsible for the outbreak from the well of Locust Grove's Country Cottage restaurant.

Health officials stated early in the investigation last year that the restaurant could be the source of the outbreak. However, they did not find the O111 strain in the restaurant's well or after any testing of ill food handlers at Country Cottage.

Edmondson then complained that state health officials "botched" the testing because the tests were negative. He contends the department left him hanging out there with his claim poultry waste likely caused the E. coli illnesses.

Sixty-one percent of callers in a recent Phoenix readers' poll said poultry waste probably is contaminating wells. Undoubtedly, it could happen.

Nutrients in animal waste have caused odor and taste problems in public drinking supplies, and as early as 12 years ago, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency estimated that one-third of the nation's agricultural non-point source pollution was due to animal waste.

So Edmondson has a case, but he also has the lawsuit against poultry companies seeking millions of dollars in damages to Oklahoma's environment. That case is set to be heard this year.

Let's hear the case, let health officials and researchers do their investigations, and Edmondson should stop trying to tie Locust Grove to poultry waste on speculation. As it stands now, the poultry companies are right — Edmondson looks as if he jumped on Locust Grove's E. coli to bolster his lawsuit, not resolve a serious health issue.

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